



MERCHANT NAVY WELFARE BOARD

NOTES OF THE COVID-19 SEAFARERS' WELFARE WORKING GROUP (COVID-19 SWWG) VIDEOCONFERENCE MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 7th OCTOBER 2020

PRESENT: Mr Peter Tomlin (Chairman)	MNWB
Mr David Appleton (DA)	Nautilus International (NI)
Mr Alexander Campbell (ACL)	Queen Victoria's Seamen's Rest (QVSR)/Tilbury SC
Valerie Coleman (VC)	Seafarers UK (SfUK) Maritime Charities Group (MCG)
Mr John Cousley (JC)	Department for Transport (DfT)
Ms Lynnette Crossley (LC)	Manchester Port Health Authority (MPHA)
Cdre David Dickens (DD)	The Fishermen's Mission (FM)
Mr Martin Foley (MF)	Stella Maris (SM)
Mr David Hammond (DH)	Human Rights At Sea (HRAS)
Mr Nick Harvey (NH)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mr Mick Howarth (MH)	Nautilus Welfare Fund (NWF)
Ms Gwen Lancaster (GL)	Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA)
Mr John Lowry (JL)	Seamen's Christian Friend Society (SCFS)
Mr Ken McLean (KL)	IMarEst Guild of Benevolence (IMarEst)
Miss Victoria Muir (VM)	Trinity House (TH)
Capt. Justin Osmond (JO)	Shipwrecked Mariners' Society (SMS)
Mr Rob Poole (RP)	Fishing Amateur (FA)
Mrs Christine Rankin (CR)	The Watch Ashore (WA)
Ms Carla Rockson (CR)	Marine Society (MS)
Ms Laura Simons (LS)	MCG Comms Consultant
Mrs Catherine Spencer (CS)	Seafarers UK (SfUK)
Mr Tim Springett (TS)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)
Mrs Deanne Thomas (DT)	Sailors' Children's Society (SCS)
Ms Sara Walsh (SW)	British Ports Association (BPA)
Mrs Sandra Welch (SW)	Seafarers' Hospital Society (SHS)
Ms Melanie White (MW)	UK Chamber of Shipping (UK CoS)

The meeting opened at 11.00am. The Chairman reminded members that the working group provided a useful two-way communications route between government, industry, maritime charities and local Port Welfare Committees around the UK. Useful links and notes from the meetings would be posted on the MNWB COVID-19 Maritime Resources web page <https://www.mnwb.org/maritime-updates> Members provided COVID-19 specific updates on their respective organisations as follows:

JC, DfT – Robert Courts has been appointed as the new Maritime Minister and is interested in how the UK can carry out work internationally to unlock the current issues related to Covid-19 within the sector. The issues with the transit and transfer of seafarers into the country continue due to Covid restrictions and the Department is working with Home Office colleagues on this, which is taking some time as Home Office Legal is concerned about unintended consequences for the immigration system. The Maritime Minister is meeting with the Immigration Minister next week to discuss issues within aviation and maritime. Talking to PHE to try and rectify some of the issues with tracking and testing. There is also some confusion with the new QR posters, also following up with PHE to ensure that the messaging is consistent and understood within the maritime sector. The national minimum wage has been extended to all seafarers in our territorial waters regardless of nationality or the vessel served on. The big issue for both the industry and the unions is effective enforcement to protect the 'good' employers and make sure they are not being undercut by other operators who continue to ignore the new legislation. This will impact modern slavery and

exploitation, particularly within fishing. The MCA, Border Force and HMRC are working together to ensure there is a comprehensive regime in place to protect seafarers and fishers.

Regarding new guidance from Home Office, concessions being considered for third party nationals include a visa waiver. The time a seafarer can stay in the UK is the main focus and to allow enough time for the operator to arrange the transit to join a vessel. Regarding visa waivers, ILO 185 documents are not recognised if the issuing state has not ratified them previously and it is being put to ministers that all 185 documents are recognised going forward regardless of whether they have previously ratified 108. The Department is trying to make the case that seafarers are very low risk and that the existing requirements are not currently working for seafarers. TS stated that the UK CoS would be happy to support the case.

JC stated the national minimum wage came into force on 1st October and will apply to fishermen in our territorial waters. The amendment made was based on an existing order which made reference to the UK Continental Shelf and not to the Exclusive Economic Zone. The Department might be asking Defra for full coverage.

Regarding the SED issue which the previous Maritime Minister had been working hard on, the CoS has raised this with the Minister. Mark Dickinson, NI, is meeting with the Minister next week who is keen to take this forward. JC hopes to know more about this next week.

Regarding the number of seafarers awaiting repatriation, the numbers in the UK are now relatively low although the issues are now whether relief crew can get into the UK.

TS, UK CoS – TS took part in the recent ICS meeting. The situation worldwide is probably getting worse, restrictions are being re-imposed rather than lifted in many countries in the Far East. There have been reports of seafarers refused access to medical treatment ashore for non-Covid conditions, discussions have been held with P&I Clubs regarding this. It is usually possible to get seafarers ashore and taken to medical facilities but at great expense, it depends on the particular case as to whether the P&I Clubs will pick up the tabs on this. Cargo carriers are putting clauses into contracts and charge parties, specifying no crew changes that is indicative of an increasingly hard line being taken by Charterers. This issue first manifested itself with ships diverting hundreds of miles just to undertake crew changes, at a cost of time and expense to the shipowner. There were attempts to produce a deviation clause to divide the cost between the ship owner and the cargo owner but cargo owners are not accepting it. Following on from the UK led ministerial summit in July, there is now the possibility that the Norwegian government will hold one. Another government is needed to get involved in the same way as the UK. Resolutions have been passed at the IMO and an entire day of the recent maritime safety committee was devoted to the issue of crew changes. This issue was raised at the General Assembly and the Secretary General of the UN made a statement on the importance of crew change overs. The European Commission is recommending a co-ordinated approach to restrictions on free movement and for seafarers to be recognised as key workers. ECSA (European Community Shipowners' Associations) are lobbying hard to try to get the original text reinstated that would prioritise testing over quarantining for seafarers and other transport workers as this has been deleted by the German Presidency. TS has heard reports that some local port authorities in the UK are reluctant to allow crew changes which is against national government policy. TS is investigating this and if confirmed, will refer on to JC.

DA, NI – The issue of shore leave is a balance between respecting the rights of seafarers and risk mitigation. All of the detrimental effect is placed on the seafarer. The issue of shore leave is even more important when seafarers have been onboard for a long time. There are a number of reports of companies issuing blanket shore leave bans to all of their crew. Private terminals issuing blanket shore leave bans was discussed at the Milford Haven Port Welfare Committee. NI recognises that there will be times when it is appropriate to assess the risk and to determine whether it is appropriate or not for seafarers to go ashore but doesn't believe that blanket bans by companies or terminals are appropriate or in compliance with international regulations.

JC confirmed that this was not in compliance with the UK's national position and urged members to raise issues on this with the DfT. Crew wherever possible should have access to shore leave as per the international requirements. TS stated that a nuanced approach was needed in these exceptional times and individual company policies may need to be respected and that different cases should be treated on their merits.

GL, MCA – GL introduced herself as a Marine Surveyor based on the Humber and would be replacing Neil Atkinson on the committee. The MCA has restarted port state control inspections on foreign ships and survey inspections on international ships, depending on what countries they have operated in and where crew have joined. There has been at least one detention due to non-payment of wages and some repatriation issues which have been resolved through partnership working. New guidance will soon be published and is currently in draft. The MCA has been proactive in the last month or so on fishing vessels, most issues have been resolved. All cruise vessels around the UK are being monitored.

VC & LS, MCG – VC - Continuing to meet on a monthly basis to assess the overall charitable response to Covid-19. The main focus has been the potential impact of redundancies in the ferry and cruise sectors. A working group of industry, union and charity partners has been set up to discuss the potential response. At the last meeting the discussion focused on the potential for a time limited fund which might support a range of responses to redundancy and retraining needs. Also trying to collect information about the different potential responses from other agencies. Thanked MNWB for placing information on this on the Seafarer Support website. Considering career and training opportunities that people could be directed to. Also working very closely with the MS on this issue. LS – World mental health day is on Saturday, a press release will be issued tomorrow urging shipping companies and training commissioners to use the standard on mental health and wellbeing awareness training launched in the summer with the MNTB.

ACL, QVSR & TSC – A staff member has tested positive for Covid-19 which has caused concern in a community of 200 people and has emphasised that the government's definition on close contact needs to be clear. ACL is happy to share his experience on dealing with this situation with members. Working closely with PH to ensure that everyone is kept safe and the correct guidance is followed. In the port, the staff continue to offer support through the Chaplaincy and the seafarers' centre. The cruise ships may be auctioned and are currently working with safe manning crews of approx. 260. Since the UK government has moved to tighter restrictions, crew are not coming off the ships with instructions coming from the harbour master, port health, the Captain and then a choice for the crew member to make. Scaremongering tactics are being used to encourage some crew not to take shore leave. QVSR/TSC are working with agents to facilitate crew changes. QVSR is accommodating crew waiting to go on flights or new crew on arrival into the country which is complex due to requirements for quarantining, a negative Covid test result and ultimately waiting for the ship's Captain to be happy for them to join the ship. QVSR/TSC are providing support where appropriate.

CR, WA – All is well at Care Ashore, staff are shopping for all the residents once again as the minibus is no longer taking residents into town to go shopping. A new staff member has joined and a new Chief Executive will join on 16th November. Asked ACL and MH for ideas on providing entertainment for residents in the event of another lockdown as Care Ashore will be without a Chief Executive for the next 4-5 weeks. Continuing to look for new trustees and hope to have more by the end of the month. Seafarers Link – members continue to really enjoy the service and can't be without it. The members are very enthusiastic about Zoom, the weekly calls are so beneficial for their wellbeing. CR asked whether SfUK and MNWB could investigate providing further assistance with IT support/equipment.

DD, FM – Sadly, a fisherman was lost at sea last week and the coroner is yet to release the body. An MAIB investigation is underway but this is almost certainly a suicide. It appears from messages found on his mobile that he was facing financial ruin. This tragedy is therefore most probably an unfortunate consequence of Covid-19. Coincidentally, FM began a media campaign on Monday to encourage clients to get in touch early and before getting into desperate

circumstances. There has been an uptick in need, as financial difficulties are prevalent at the moment, particularly in SW & SE Scotland. There have been issues with repatriation and the availability of flights for Ghanaians and huge frustration with having to pay for private Covid tests 48 hours before a flight and when those flights are cancelled having to pay for the test to be retaken. There have also been issues with passports and visas running out. For caseworking, the Covid related benefits scene is confusing across all four devolved authorities and it is therefore difficult to know whether people are receiving what they are entitled to.

DT, SCS – Benefitted from slight downturn in volumes during August and September, as children have gone back to school the emotional needs of the families has reduced. Starting to see a small pick up in volumes again. The staff have used the downtime to catch up emotionally as the team has experienced a high level of bereavements across the people SCS supports. More families have been offered bereavement counselling via Relate. Currently looking at an extension to the emergency Covid-19 scheme. Trinity House has also helped with providing slow cookers to families living in poverty. No MN cases to report. Recently tried to get onto local BBC radio in both Kent and Hull but unfortunately both stations were too busy on this occasion but will keep trying on behalf of Seafarer Support. SCS hold a large Sportsmen's lunch every year which will be held as a virtual event for the first time tomorrow. Members are encouraged to watch and join in.

CR, MS – Pleased to see an upturn in seafarers joining online courses. MS is developing their own accredited Maths@Sea course, now an official Level 3 qualification, open to all seafarers. Also developing a Navigation@Sea Level 2 course. CR is participating in the working group to help seafarers made redundant during Covid-19 to access funding for education.

JL, SCFS – The Chaplains are working in the ports when the opportunities present themselves. Headquarters is working to raise awareness amongst the public about the challenges seafarers are facing during the pandemic.

KM, IMarEst – The summer was quiet. Interested to hear about the Redundancy/Retraining working group mentioned by VC. IMarEst runs training courses and has an initiative called 'Sea Your Future' aimed at school leavers and support is provided to students, trainees, cadets and apprentices. This could potentially be developed further to help with the work discussed by VC.

LC, MPHA – Have had to pull back on boarding inspections unfortunately to make interim visits between the sanitation certificates due to the increase in lockdown in the area. Carrying on with sanitation certificates and water samples on request, and prompting people on this. There is a variable response amongst port health authorities regarding expired certificates. In N & W Africa, large fines can be levied. Giving ships a clear idea on PPE and precautions MPHA will take and so far have been welcomed onboard.

MF, SM – Seen an increase in ship visiting and online activity in the last month. Seafarers have been in contact regarding various contractual problems which have been resolved with the assistance of others, thanks in particular to the ITF for their help in recent cases. SM celebrated its 100th birthday at the weekend with a small gathering held in Glasgow, the city where Stella Maris was founded, led by the Archbishop of Glasgow. It was a joyful event with some sadness as the gathering was much smaller than originally anticipated as visitors from around the world were unable to attend due to the pandemic.

MH, NWF – Merseyside has been put back into lockdown since 22nd September. One staff member in the care home tested positive as did one lady in respite care. The care home has been closed to new admissions and is in full lockdown. All staff are tested weekly and disappointingly the staff member who tested positive worked three more shifts following a test before getting the test result back. All staff and residents were tested last Friday, all results were negative. If all results are negative following testing this Friday, the care home can hopefully re-open. The residents have taken the new restrictions fairly stoically. The caseworker service had restarted home visits in July but this is now on pause due to the local lockdown in Merseyside. The caseworker in Glasgow has also had to pause home visits due to the lockdown in Glasgow.

NH, SfUK – Tomorrow SfUK will be holding a webinar to launch Fishing Without a Safety Net, a report on the financial situation for many UK fishers including share catch fishers. Members are encouraged to sign up for the webinar, details are on SfUK's website. A big push has been given over the last 24 hours to the fact that so far, £1.3 million of the £2 million Covid-19 emergency fund has been dispersed. SfUK is keen to encourage more not for profit organisations and charities to make further bids to this fund. This money can be used to help make a difference to seafarers, both UK and international, who are in distress, fatigued or suffering because of the crew change crisis. Those who have previously bid are welcome to bid again. The message of the PR which will be getting widespread coverage over the next few days is that SfUK wants to encourage bids to come in so this money can be allocated by trustees through the grants committee.

DH, HRAS – Fisheries along with FM and human rights and social welfare baseline report is now available, covering issues across the supply chain including fishers, retailers and supply chain organisations. In New Zealand a report was issued concerning the lack of government intervention and support to seafarers' centres. The government has now recognised this report publicly and it is now embedded in their transport policy and will be part of a forthcoming manifesto. Thanked MtS, SM and other teams who helped on this. Putting together an international report on the blacklisting of Masters who stood up for their crew in protecting Covid from coming onboard their vessels. Latest flag state report is out for flag states and human rights. Pleased to be engaged with other welfare organisations as HRAS has received a small sum of money from other donors which is being used to support those on the front line.

RP, FA – Hearing from more fishermen requesting payment holidays for the loans they have and are likely to have a couple of defaults this month. Fishers, under 10m, are finding life very hard at the moment. It will be months before the real financial cases become clear.

RH, ISWAN – Still receiving a high number of calls on Seafarer Help, there was a dip which has gone up again in the last few days. Main problems are financial hardship, repatriation and the psychological stress of seafarers spending a long time onboard. There was a murder onboard a vessel going from China to the US amongst Filipino crew, cases such as this are concerning. Releasing a new video on Saturday for World Mental Health day. Grateful to SfUK for funding extra staff for Seafarer Help.

SW, SHS – No new applications for Covid-related grants. Funds are available for the MN and members are encouraged to help get the message out. Will soon be running a small campaign to highlight the welfare grants that are available to fishers and the MN. Our physios are running face to face treatments again although it is uncertain how long this may continue in various regions. The dreadnought service is available but has a long waiting list. The advice is that people approach their local NHS for treatment in the first instance. Seafit dental and wellbeing tours have taken place in the past month and have been successful. They will hopefully also be held in Cornwall in the next couple of weeks.

SW, BPA – Concerns over delays in testing in the port sector, as is the case in the rest of the country, and resilience issues over the winter due to people potentially having to self-isolate. Asked TS and JC to send a list of ports who are not allowing crew changes or shore leave so that BPA can follow up directly.

SC, MNWB – Issues have been raised at the Port Welfare Committees regarding private terminals where risk assessments have been used to prevent seafarers coming ashore. The port of Felixstowe has reported that some seafarers in port have experienced difficulties seeking medical assistance. The Board's MiFi project, funded by the DfT, Seafarers UK and MNWB continues to provide seafarers with MiFi in UK ports and has been widely publicised. The Board's 'Seafarer Support' website has been rebuilt and went live in August. Users can directly contact more than 150 maritime charities. The Board is planning a marketing campaign to promote the service and maritime charities. Since the cancellation of face to face training courses, the Board has been concentrating its resources on creating and providing e-learning courses and has developed a

bespoke seafarers' mental health awareness trainer-led Zoom course which complies with the MCG's standard for seafarers' mental health and awareness training. This will be offered to constituent members and PWCs from November.

SW, BPA stated that reports have been received from other ports of seafarers experiencing difficulties accessing dental treatment also. She raised this on a call yesterday with PHE who stated that this is unfortunately a common problem across the country at this time.

VM, TH – VM has discussed the redundancy/retraining support previously mentioned, with the TH Board who, along with MNWB, are considering committing funds to provide retraining for serving seafarers who have lost their jobs during the pandemic. Looking forward to seeing how this progresses.

Post meeting update from Ijeoma Ajibade, Mission to Seafarers: Not much has changed over the past month. Newport, Belfast, Dunkerque, and Fowey centres are open. North Tees should be opening over the next few weeks. Ship visiting continues.

Members voted in favour of Covid-19 WG meetings being held on a monthly basis but agreed to increase this to fortnightly if required.

Closing Remark - Members to forward any links, extra information and note amendments to Celia celia@mnwb.org.uk Meeting format to remain flexible. Apologies for any unintended inaccuracies. Members agreed that meeting notes could be centrally displayed on the MNWB website.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING: Wednesday 4th November 2020 at 11:00